

project proposal ■ cem altınöz ■ 14/11

What?

I want to make an installation consisting of a moving image and a series of still images.

The moving image is going to be an interactive multichannel video with channels that audience can go through. On the primary channel will be a video essay revolving around the Madımak Massacre of 1993, while other channels will consist mostly of videos I made out of found footage from Turkish mass media channels, mainly images that left a trace on my thinking of the past either through emotional impact or through excessive repetition. While the audience will have some control over the image on the screen, I want to set an equilibrium between the main video channel and other channels.

The series of 35mm images will be photographs of places where the traumatic events covered in the video essay were set, like the former Madımak Hotel (now a Science and Culture Center) and other relevant settings. I want the still images to have a juxtaposing relation to the video images, in terms of their quality as personal photographic objects. They might be in the form of framed prints or a photo-book.

How?

I have started to collect videos through Youtube, I am currently categorizing them in order to create clips and making prototypes out of them. I also conduct research through conversations with my friends of Turkish nationality about the instances they remember, and include them if those images had the same effect on me as well. These will mainly serve as the minor channels in the video installation.

I am conducting a research by reading articles on Madımak Massacre, including the ones about its historical existence, its presence in mass media channels, but also its significance as a traumatic event in the collective memory, in comparison with other significant events in Turkish history. I want to make the video essay without a voiceover or an accompanying text that explains the image shown on the screen (besides subtitles when seen fit), I want to make a visual narration through montage. However I will be checking the literary works that employ a more personal approach to the event, delve into the poetic works of the victim Metin Altıoklar, and also the discourses of politicians on this event in order to have a base for the narration.



For the still images, I plan to go to the places that the events took place and document their present condition, and also small monumental parks in other cities that were named after the Madımak Massacre as an effort to keep the memory of the event alive. I will be making analog photographic images, and may use my style of physical manipulation in the darkroom printing process.

As the still images will be about the individual memory aspect of the event, I am also considering the possibility of including family photographs that I might obtain through two possible interviews, one with Zeynep Altıoklar (Metin Altıoklar's daughter, and currently a minister of CHP, the main opposition party) and the other with the family of Carina Joanna Thuijs, the only foreign victim of the massacre.

Timetable?

Until the break I aim to create a certain amount of videos that could take place in the channels. After the winter break I will start to work on the video essay. Throughout this period I can still develop the way I want to design the installation, and depending on the decision I can act accordingly; getting familiar with Arduino, or making more small clips for other channels if necessary, etc. I plan to have all the moving images ready by April, and from that point on I aim to work on the representation of the works in the installation. The timetable is subject to change if I succeed at arranging interviews with families of the victims.

Why?

Memory is a crucial aspect in formation of identity. When thought of as memory objects, photographic images possess the ability to form the memory of individuals. I am interested in the different ways our memory is constantly being reconstructed, with the images we are constantly exposed to through mass media, mainly the TV and the Internet, as the primary sources of the images (especially moving images) about the world that surrounds us. Often, the choice of images are determined (in terms of the content and the aesthetics) by an institution of power, be it the government, a news agency, the media bosses etc. All the choices that are made from the recording of the image to the distribution of the image always contain a political influence. I want to discover these influences that shape our memory, and show what is also happening in my country, in the present, in the actual. In my video installation I want to give some (limited) control to the audience on what they can see on the screen, similar to the limited control they have in real life. In the installation I undertake the role of authority, and I demand that they look into the images of trauma and injustice, repeating themselves, while being accompanied by a pinch of instances of real life absurdities.



The Madimak Massacre is one of the darkest moments in recent Turkish history, with a death toll of 37 people, 33 of them being artists and their families visiting the town for the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival that they have been invited to participate. Even though there were other massacres done by radical Islamists toward Alevi population in the same decade, its particular traumatic nature is caused by two primary reasons. The first one is the current situation of the primary perpetrators; in 2011, one of the main perpetrators was claimed to be found dead in Sivas, exact city the massacre has happened, while some of them became German citizens to evade the prosecution.

The other reason is the dismissed request of victims' families and Alevi organizations to transform the building into a museum. After its restoration, the building served as a Kebap restaurant for ten years, and now has been made a very mediocre science and culture center. Inside the building, there is a wall designated to the massacre, its banality aside, the main problem of the monument is that the name of two perpetrators are also on this alphabetically arrayed plaques. The families cannot accept a monument that carries the names of the killers next to their loved ones.

The inability to face this past event completely until this day is caused by the government's damaged nature in juridicial mechanism and incompetence in mishandling the aftermath. There have also been many disturbing statements by politicians after the event trying to justify the crowd by claiming that the event was caused by the provocation made by the author Aziz Nesin, who was the main target the crowd failed to kill. The discriminating hate speeches of politicians go hand in hand with the obscenity of this event that happened openly in broad daylight. The agony arises from the fact that an event with such devastating outcomes actually could have been prevented very easily by the law enforcement institutions of the government. To this day, all the actions of the authorities have proved to be acts of denial, but never a confrontation. Sadly, this approach is not particular solely to this event, but is the case with many other crimes committed towards ethnical minorities in Turkey.

The representation of the trauma in contemporary art (mainly through photographic images) is investigated by Margaret Iversen in her book "Photography, Trace and Trauma" (2017). The idea of using art as a tool to represent the "unrepresentable" intrigues me, and in the body of work I'll make I want to transfuse the feeling of the traumatic, senseless injustice.



Who?

I believe all the tutors and fellow students from the masters can help me through sharing their points of view about the project, but especially Natasha with her insight and Javi with his knowledge on interactive artworks. Older family members and acquaintances who have witnessed the event on TV and lived through those years. I want to conduct an interview with the minister Zeynep Altıoklar who is still very active in the fight against the dim atmosphere of the

event and its aftermath. Depending on her approach, I also want to include her personal family photographs in the installation that can serve as a representation of the individual memory aspect in this social event. I'll also try to get in contact with the family of Carina Joanna Thuijs, the Dutch national who fell victim to the massacre.

Previous Practice

In the film I made for the Eye ResearchLabs I tried to cover the subject of recollection of a past event, and aimed to show the fragility of memory. With "Transgross", I made a curation of the forgotten images in my hard drive to create a physical object that would be disturbing and beautiful at the same time. In the analog images that I made in the darkroom or with the scanner, I questioned the limits of a photograph, and aimed to create a certain language for myself that would convey the feeling of the object, the traumatic. I might use the same physical manipulation techniques for the still images of this project.

Also, I can say that the subjects that we covered in our annotated reader last year form a basis to my work, especially with the terminology Flusser uses and his understanding of the cybernetic structure of the apparatus.

Larger Context

In the larger context, the works are connected to the recollection of past events in social domain; therefore the people that produced texts on the collective memory, such as Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Jan Assmann, Henri Bergson are relevant. In terms of his works on the ICTs and as a more contemporary philosopher, I think the work of Bernard Stiegler might be relevant as well.

Some artists that I relate in terms of the subjects they cover and methods they utilize are Harun Farocki, Hito Steyerl and Robert Rauschenberg.

References

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